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Survival advice abounds

Baby boomers still grappling with computer age

The survival advice business appears to be thriving.

I'm not talking about survival in the sense of survivalists who might retreat to the woods expecting the world to end.

No, this is survival in the everyday, mundane world of workplaces.

Many of us don't feel comfortable with computer technology. We need to adapt. But how do we do this?

Two of the latest offerings in the genre are Jim Carroll's book Surviving The Information Age ($14.95 Prentice Hall Canada) and Tom Peters' CD-ROM Career Survival Guide (About $35, Houghton Mifflin interactive).

The key word in both these books is "survive." Forget about prospering or winning. The focus these days is to use your ingenuity to keep from drowning.

How well do these works fulfill their stated objectives?

Like quitting smoking or dieting, preparing yourself for the information age is probably more a question of doing rather than reading or studying. But if you lack motivation or need a refresher on some basics, these products might be helpful.

Carroll regularly refers back to his own experience as an accountant in a large company. He got fed up and quit because he felt he could fulfil his potential better by being self employed.

A key part of his advice is that he did this and so can you. But he made his success by telling other people how they can do it. He is co-author of the enormously successful Canadian Internet Handbook, among other books, and is a very busy professional speaker. How many of us can make a living doing that?

Sometimes his advice is more inspirational than practical:

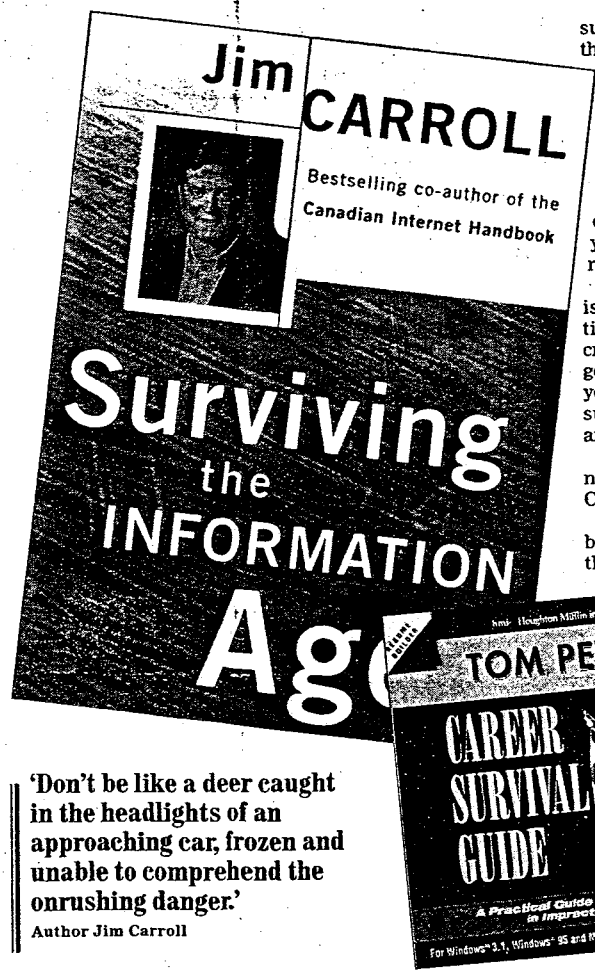
"Don't be like a deer caught in the headlights of an approaching car, frozen and unable to comprehend the onrushing danger. Accept it, comprehend it, challenge it and win," he writes.

Or at another point, he suggests: "To prepare for change, you have to be willing to accept change, and the first step in doing that is to have a positive outlook about life and about the opportunities of the information age."

What is more helpful, though, is that Carroll has taken a hard look at why some people seem to have so much trouble with computers.

He directs his attention at baby boomers, "the last in the history of mankind to not have been exposed to computers since birth. Is it any wonder that we have such a unique relationship with them?"

Baby boomers come from a generation that had to learn about computers the hard way.


Jim CARROLL
Bestselling co-author of the Canadian Internet Handbook
Surviving the INFORMATION Age
hmi Houghton Mifflin Interactive
TOM PETERS'
CAREER SURVIVAL GUIDE
A Practical Guide to Getting Ahead in Impractical Times
For Windows® 3.1, Windows® 95 and Macintosh®

'Don't be like a deer caught in the headlights of an approaching car, frozen and unable to comprehend the onrushing danger.'
Author Jim Carroll

They've had to grapple with software that doesn't work, manuals that don't make sense and a stifling mentality that computers are just glorified calculators.

Whereas "(o)ne need only look to the kids of today to realize that generations after us have accepted the computer without hesitation."

He feels baby boomers "need an attitude adjustment."

That comment is a bit reminiscent of the terse buzz-phrases by Peters in his CD-ROM. Peters, most known for his immensely popular book, In Search Of Excellence, says we need to "make it wow."

The CD-ROM is organized around multimedia "crash courses" to "reinvent yourself" to "learn to be a project manager" and "think resumé." The idea is to to go through a "mind-bending journey designed to kick-start your career into the 21st century."

In the reinvent yourself section, the user goes through a multimedia question session to assess your current beliefs. From there you explore multimedia career advice.

The project manager section is an effort to structure your time and priorities into concrete projects with measurable goals. From there you direct your efforts into creating a resumé to highlight your skills and get your next project.

Certainly, if you feel you need a guru in your life, the CD-ROM is for you.

Or if you feel you'd like to get beyond survival and prosper in the years ahead, you can wait for Carroll's next book : Thriving In The Information Age.

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The Hamilton-Wentworth FreeNet has gone graphical.

The community-based service that was formerly only text-based is now offering a "PremiumPlus," graphics-based service for $150 per year. That works out to about $12.50 per month which is slightly less than the going rate by commercial Internet service providers.

Memberships are still available for $5 per year for text access.

The FreeNet received a three-year $489,551 grant in March 1995 to provide affordable access to online community information, e-mail, news (discussion) groups and the World Wide Web. There are currently more than 9,100 regular users of the service.

Valerie Ramsay-Brown, the new executive director of the freeNet, says members want graphical access and she feels the move is necessary as the service tries to become more self-sufficient in the future.

For information, call 528-4936.